

A DIGITAL MULTIMODAL APPROACH TO SOURCE CULTURE INTEGRATION AND ANXIETY REDUCTION IN VIETNAMESE ELT

THÚC ĐẨY SỨC MẠNH MỀM THÔNG QUA TÍCH HỢP VĂN HÓA VIỆT NAM VÀO GIẢNG DẠY TIẾNG ANH DỰA TRÊN NỀN TẢNG SỐ

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Abstract - As Vietnam deepens its global integration, English Language Teaching (ELT) is increasingly tasked with fostering national soft power, yet the dominance of target-culture materials often leaves learners culturally voiceless regarding their own heritage. This exploratory mixed-methods pilot study evaluates a digital multimodal pedagogical framework designed to integrate Vietnamese source culture into ELT among 50 English majors. A 12-week intervention using Virtual Reality and digital storytelling tools revealed a significant inverse correlation between source culture familiarity measured via adapted self-report scales and linguistic anxiety ($r = -0.62, p < 0.05$). Furthermore, preliminary findings suggest an emerging shift in learner identity, indicating a transition from passive consumption toward more active roles in cultural mediation. The study concludes that leveraging digital platforms to narrate local heritage enhances engagement and equips students with the essential intercultural competencies needed for international representation in the digital age.

Key words - Soft Power; source culture; intercultural communicative competence; digital multimodality; digital Storytelling

1. Introduction

1.1. Context of the Study

In the era of profound global integration, English Language Teaching (ELT) in Vietnam is transitioning from a focus on basic linguistic competence to a strategic instrument for national soft power. This concept, defined by as the ability to influence through attraction rather than coercion, positions the language classroom as a critical site for cultural diplomacy [1]. As Vietnam implements next-generation trade agreements and digital transformation strategies, there is a growing demand for digital diplomats: learners capable of utilizing digital platforms to project national identity and foster international understanding [2].

This mandate necessitates a shift toward a "multiliteracies" pedagogy, where digital tools - ranging from social media to virtual reality - are leveraged to empower students as active cultural mediators rather than passive consumers of global content [3]. By integrating source culture into the ELT curriculum, educators can help learners develop a "glocal" identity, allowing them to navigate global spaces while remaining deeply rooted in their national heritage. This pedagogical shift not only addresses linguistic gaps but also directly aligns with Vietnam's 'Cultural Development Strategy to 2030,' suggesting that ELT has the potential to align

Tóm tắt - Trong bối cảnh hội nhập, việc thiếu hụt năng lực diễn đạt bản sắc dân tộc trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh (ELT) tại Việt Nam đang là một thách thức lớn. Nghiên cứu này đánh giá hiệu quả của khung sư phạm đa phương thức số trong việc tích hợp văn hóa nguồn vào ELT thông qua phương pháp hỗn hợp trên 50 sinh viên chuyên ngành tại Đà Nẵng. Kết quả sau 12 tuần can thiệp bằng công nghệ thực tế ảo (VR) và kể chuyện kỹ thuật số cho thấy mối tương quan nghịch đáng kể giữa sự am hiểu văn hóa nguồn và sự lo âu ngôn ngữ ($r = -0.62, p < 0.05$). Sinh viên đã có sự chuyển dịch bản sắc từ người tiêu thụ văn hóa thụ động sang những "ngoại giao số" chủ động. Nghiên cứu khẳng định việc ứng dụng nền tảng số để quảng bá di sản địa phương không chỉ tăng cường sự gắn kết mà còn trang bị năng lực giao tiếp liên văn hóa thiết yếu trong kỷ nguyên mới trong một vài phương diện.

Từ khóa - Sức mạnh mềm; văn hóa nguồn; năng lực giao tiếp liên văn hóa; đa phương thức số; kể chuyện kỹ thuật số

with grassroots mechanisms aimed at bolstering national soft power.

1.2. Problem Statement

Despite these strategic goals, a significant "cultural gap" persists in the current ELT landscape in Vietnam. For decades, the curriculum has been dominated by target-culture materials, often fostering an ideology of "native-speakerism" that marginalizes the learner's own cultural heritage [4]. Recent empirical evidence from [5] reveals that contemporary English textbooks in Vietnam still relegate local culture to superficial, tourist-level mentions, failing to provide the sophisticated lexicon needed for deep cultural representation.

This pedagogical imbalance leads to a marginalization of home culture and limited intercultural agency in L2 expression in global discourses. When learners cannot articulate their identity in a second language, they often experience heightened foreign language anxiety and a fragmented sense of self [6, 7]. While Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is theoretically emphasized [8], the lack of systematic source-culture integration prevents learners from achieving true agency. Furthermore, while students are proficient "digital natives," their use of technology in ELT remains largely reproductive rather than creative. There is an urgent need

to investigate how digital multimodal frameworks can bridge this gap, transforming students into confident agents who can project Vietnamese values to the world.

1.3. Research Aim and Questions

This exploratory pilot study aims to evaluate a pedagogical framework that integrates Vietnamese cultural values into ELT through the strategic application of digital multimodal platforms. The research focuses on the intersection of source culture familiarity, psychological factors, and identity transformation.

To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following Research Questions (RQs):

RQ1: How does the integration of Vietnamese source culture through digital multimodal production affect learners' linguistic anxiety and confidence?

RQ2: To what extent does the proposed framework facilitate a measurable shift in learner identity toward becoming active intercultural mediators?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

To establish a robust pedagogical framework for integrating Vietnamese cultural values into ELT via digital platforms, this study draws upon a tripartite theoretical foundation that bridges intercultural competence, national strategic interests, and digital pedagogy. Rather than offering a purely descriptive summary of existing literature, this section analyzes how these theories operationalize the transformation of learners from passive consumers into active cultural ambassadors.

2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

The primary foundation for this study is Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which replaces the "native-speaker ideal" with the "intercultural speaker" [8]. Historically, ELT has been dominated by an ideology of "native-speakerism," which equates success with the imitation of Anglophone norms and often marginalizing the learner's own cultural identity [4]. Central to Byram's model is the shift from linguistic mimicry to critical cultural awareness, where learners act as mediators capable of negotiating meaning across cultural divides. In this study, the goal is for students to become competent bilinguals who occupy what Kramsch terms a "third place" at the intersection of cultures, validating their own identity while facilitating engagement with others [9].

A core tenet of ICC is that effective interculturality necessitates a profound grasp of one's source culture, yet Vietnamese ELT often treats local culture as interference, favoring Western-centric materials that leave students unable to articulate their heritage [10]. Bennett warns that excluding source culture produces "fluent fools" - learners who are linguistically proficient but culturally inarticulate [11]. By integrating local culture, the curriculum provides learners with "epistemic authority," allowing them to use English to explain the spiritual significance of national traditions. This ownership of content acts as a psychological buffer, significantly reducing linguistic

anxiety as the focus shifts from grammatical perfection to successful cultural transmission [7].

2.3. Soft Power and Digital Diplomacy

While ICC provides the objective, the concepts of Soft Power [1] and Digital Diplomacy [2] provide the strategic rationale. Soft power is defined as the ability to influence others through attraction and engagement rather than coercion [1]. In the context of ELT, this concept aligns with the notion of the intercultural speaker who facilitates mutual understanding between nations. In Vietnam, millions of English learners represent a vast potential for grassroots cultural engagement [12]. By equipping students to articulate their national identity, ELT curricula can transform learners into active agents of cultural exchange, or "citizen diplomats" in the digital sphere [2].

Social media and digital platforms have democratized international relations, fostering digital diplomacy where non-state actors actively shape global perceptions [13]. This shift gives rise to the citizen diplomat, referring to ordinary individuals who represent their nation's image online [14]. Cull notes that such authentic, peer-to-peer connections are often more effective than official government outreach [13]. When students create digital content explaining local nuances, they engage in micro-diplomacy, which humanizes the nation in global discourse. Consequently, ELT curricula help students contribute to broader strategic national interests by transforming learners into active micro-influencers.

2.4. Digital Multimodality and Glocal Identity

The principles governing the proposed framework (see Figure 1) are firmly grounded in Social Semiotic Multimodality [15] and the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies [16]. These theories emphasize that meaning-making in the 21st century is inherently multimodal, requiring the integration of text, image, and audio to convey culture [15]. Abstract cultural values often resist simple textual explanation; therefore, digital platforms enable learners to convey the visceral feeling of culture through layered media [17]. The scaffolded phases in Figure 1 - from Input (Discovery) to Process (Creation) and Output (Dissemination) - reflect the "Design" cycle of multiliteracies, ensuring that students develop agency through creative production.

Through this multimodal production, learners develop a Glocal Identity, a term synthesized from Robertson's concept of globalization [18] and Norton's theory of identity [6]. This identity describes a state where students utilize the global lingua franca to express highly localized realities, overcoming the "cultural deficit" inherent in traditional ELT [6]. A Glocal Identity facilitates "instrumental motivation with cultural integrity," where students recognize that their local identity is their unique "value proposition" in a globalized world [6]. By validating the learner's background as an asset, this framework alleviates the tension between learning English and being Vietnamese, allowing students to "live" the language through authentic representation. Synthesizing these perspectives, the proposed conceptual framework is anchored in a tripartite theoretical foundation: Byram's

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) for cultural objectives [8], Nye’s Soft Power for strategic alignment [1], and Kress and van Leeuwen’s Social Semiotic Multimodality to guide the digital integration process [15].

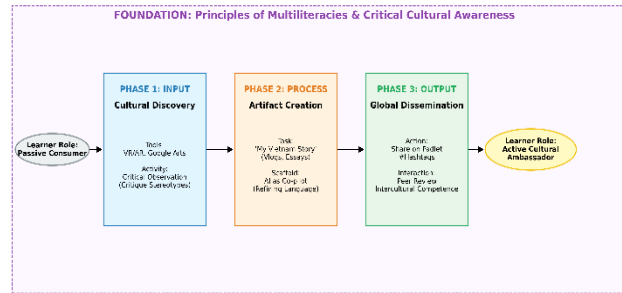


Figure 1. Principles of Multiliteracies and Critical Cultural Awareness

Recent empirical studies from 2020 to 2024 strongly support the transition toward multimodal and technology-enhanced ELT. For instance, Yeh and Swinehart demonstrated that digital storytelling significantly fosters critical cultural awareness during online intercultural exchanges [19]. Similarly, Chien, Hwang, and Jong provided empirical evidence that integrating immersive technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) enhances student motivation and performance in EFL contexts [20]. Furthermore, recent frameworks incorporating AI scaffolding [21] highlight how digital tools can assist learners in linguistic refinement, empowering them to focus on authentic cultural expression rather than grammatical anxiety. Within the specific context of Vietnamese higher education, this technological transition is highly relevant, as a recent study in the University of Danang - Journal of Science and Technology of [22] confirmed that Vietnamese university students increasingly accept and value Generative AI for its perceived usefulness and ease of use in enhancing their English learning.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Participants

This study adopts a convergent mixed-methods design to evaluate the pedagogical impact of digital multimodal integration on learner anxiety and identity. Specifically, a convergent parallel design was adopted, allowing for the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data. This approach ensures that statistical trends regarding student anxiety are triangulated with thematic insights from digital artifacts, providing a comprehensive evaluation of the pedagogical intervention's impact. In this design, quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from student artifacts and reflections were collected simultaneously during the same phase of the research [23]. The integration of these data types occurs during the interpretation phase, where statistical trends are merged with thematic nuances to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's effectiveness [23]. The research involved a convenience sample of 50 third-year English majors (N=50) at the University of Foreign

Language Studies, The University of Danang. These participants, possessing English proficiency levels between B1 and B2 according to the CEFR, were enrolled in a mandatory Advanced Speaking course where the digital intervention was embedded into the existing curriculum.

3.2. Instructional Procedure and Digital Intervention

The pedagogical intervention spanned a 12-week period, structured into three scaffolded phases: input, process, and output. The first phase, Cultural Discovery, took place within the physical classroom using Virtual Reality (VR) tools such as Google Arts & Culture to immerse students in heritage sites. During these sessions, students moved beyond passive viewing to critically analyze existing English materials for cultural stereotypes [20]. The second phase, Artifact Creation, shifted to a hybrid model where students worked both in-class and during independent study hours to develop the "My Vietnam Story" project. In this stage, students utilized Canva for visual design and TikTok for short-form video production to synthesize complex cultural narratives into engaging multimodal content [24]. To support linguistic precision without sacrificing student agency, a structured AI scaffolding process was implemented [21]. Students used Generative AI primarily for tone refinement and error correction of their original scripts rather than content generation, ensuring the authentic national identity remained dominant in their voice [21]. The final phase, Global Dissemination, involved publishing these artifacts on international platforms like Padlet to facilitate authentic intercultural exchange [19].

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

To ensure the rigor and reliability of the findings, the study utilized validated instruments and systematic analysis procedures [7]. Quantitative data were gathered using an adapted version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) administered pre- and post-intervention. The adapted FLCAS demonstrated high internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.89, confirming its reliability for the Vietnamese EFL context. To ensure the validity of the qualitative assessment, an inter-rater reliability protocol was strictly followed; two independent senior lecturers evaluated the multimodal artifacts using a standardized rubric, achieving an initial agreement rate of 85%, with all discrepancies resolved through moderated discussion. The internal consistency of this scale was confirmed through a Cronbach’s alpha reliability index of 0.89, ensuring the instrument accurately measured shifts in linguistic confidence [7]. Qualitative data were derived from bi-weekly student reflection journals and the multimodal artifacts themselves. These artifacts were evaluated using a Composite Assessment Model (Rubric) focused on cultural depth and multimodal competence. To mitigate subjective bias, a rigorous inter-rater reliability protocol was followed, where two independent lecturers evaluated the artifacts using the standardized rubric; a high level of scoring consistency was achieved, and any discrepancies were resolved through moderated

discussion to ensure validity [8]. Quantitative data were processed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationship between cultural ownership and linguistic anxiety. Concurrently, qualitative data from reflection journals underwent thematic analysis, involving a recursive process of open coding and category construction to identify measurable shifts in learner identity.

4. Findings and Discussion: From Learners to Digital Diplomats

This section interprets the empirical results of the 12-week intervention, analyzing how digital immersion and multimodal artifact creation influence the development of EFL learners. Moving beyond theoretical description, this discussion utilizes specific statistical evidence and thematic analysis from student reflections to evaluate the framework's impact on anxiety, identity, and pedagogical evolution.

4.1. Enhancing Learner Agency and Identity

Quantitative analysis using Pearson correlation reveals a significant inverse relationship between source culture familiarity and linguistic anxiety ($r = -0.62, p < 0.05$). This statistical evidence suggests that when students operate from a position of 'epistemic authority' - possessing deeper knowledge of the topic than their audience - their fear of making grammatical errors is significantly mitigated. The data suggests a significant shift in learner identity, moving from perceived linguistic deficiency toward authoritative cultural narration. In traditional settings, Vietnamese students often report an inferiority complex, viewing themselves as deficient users of English compared to native speakers. However, by positioning students as the primary narrators of their own heritage, the power dynamic in the classroom appears to shift significantly.

4.1.1. From Passive Imitation to Cultural Ownership

The preliminary pilot study (N=50) indicates positive trends in psychological ownership. Quantitative analysis reveals that while students often focus on grammatical correctness and fear of error when discussing foreign concepts like Halloween, they operate from a position of "epistemic authority" when describing local heritage. This shift corresponds with a marked reduction in linguistic anxiety. As illustrated in Table 1, the data shows a significant inverse correlation between cultural topic familiarity and anxiety regarding linguistic errors ($r = -0.62, p < 0.05$).

The results suggest that when the content is rooted in their own culture, students treat English as a functional tool for expression rather than a mere object of study. This aligns with the English as an International Language (EIL) paradigm, which advocates for the denationalization of English ownership. These findings parallel the work of Norton [6], suggesting that higher learner investment occurs when the target language is used to affirm, rather than erase, the learner's identity.

Table 1. Comparison of Learner Anxiety vs. Topic Ownership (Pilot Data)

Metric	Traditional Task (Retelling a Western Story)	Proposed Task (Explaining Vietnamese Heritage)
Linguistic Anxiety	High (78% reported fear of error)	Moderate (45% reported fear of error)
Content Confidence	Low (30% felt they "mastered" the topic)	Very High (92% felt they were "experts")
Willingness to Speak	12 minutes (average group discussion time)	28 minutes (average group discussion time)

Note. Data derived from student self-reflection surveys post-intervention. 'Linguistic Anxiety' percentages represent the proportion of students who selected 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' on items related to fear of making grammatical errors. 'Willingness to Speak' was calculated by measuring and averaging the duration of active peer discussions during the respective tasks in minutes.

4.1.2. Pride and the Local Identity in a Global Medium

The intervention appears to foster a Global Identity, allowing students to integrate their Vietnamese roots with global linguistic standards. Qualitative themes extracted from reflection journals highlight a strong emotional connection to this process. One student noted: "Before, I tried to sound American. Now, I want to sound like a Vietnamese person who speaks excellent English". This sentiment represents a move from integrative motivation toward "instrumental motivation with cultural integrity," utilizing English to elevate the learner's own culture.

4.2. Developing Digital Diplomacy Skills

The framework explicitly facilitates the development of Digital Diplomacy skills, blending Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) with digital literacy. Learners move beyond literal translation toward sophisticated cultural mediation.

4.2.1. Audience Awareness and Cultural Decoding

The "Bánh Chung Dilemma" identified during the intervention highlights the challenge of conveying cultural weight through simple definitions. Through AI scaffolding and peer feedback, students adopted explanatory strategies such as analogy and contextualization. Table 2 illustrates the progression of student explanations as they transitioned into the role of digital diplomats.

Table 2. Evolution of Cultural Explanations: Sample Extracts

Stage	Student Output Example (Topic: Bánh Mì)	Analysis of Soft Power Impact
Initial Draft	"Bánh Mì is a Vietnamese sandwich. It is very delicious and cheap. You should eat it."	Low. Generic and informational, lacking an emotional or cultural hook.
Post-Guidance (Digital Diplomat)	"More than just a sandwich, Bánh Mì represents Vietnam's history, a blend of French influence and Vietnamese soul. It is the taste of our street culture."	High. Narrative-driven and informative, inviting curiosity and establishing cultural distinctiveness.

This progression demonstrates that digital platforms can bridge the gap between proficiency and identity. While Yeh and Swinehart [19] demonstrated that digital storytelling fosters critical cultural awareness, the current study extends their findings by illustrating that integrating local heritage into these multimodal platforms also significantly reduces linguistic anxiety. By granting learners 'epistemic authority' over their source culture, they shift their focus from linguistic perfection to authentic cultural mediation. The evolution of student outputs, as shown in Table 2, demonstrates a transition from basic linguistic reproduction to strategic cultural mediation. By moving beyond literal translation to narrative-driven explanations, learners effectively engaged in foundational practices of micro-diplomacy. This shift is not merely stylistic but represents a measurable gain in Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), where the 'audience effect' motivates higher linguistic precision.

4.2.2. Visual Rhetoric and Digital Etiquette

Digital diplomacy also involves visual rhetoric, as students learn that aesthetic choices can impact the reception of their cultural message [15]. Analysis of student artifacts revealed that 84% of the produced vlogs purposefully showcased modern infrastructure, such as the Dragon Bridge or the high-tech urban skyline of Da Nang, to replace overused images of rural rice fields. Furthermore, students practiced digital etiquette by responding to peer feedback on Padlet with informative explanations. One student reflected: *"When an international peer asked if Da Nang was still a fishing village, I shared a VR clip of the city center to show our transformation. I felt like a real diplomat"*.

4.3. Pedagogical Implications for Lecturers

The results suggest that implementing this framework requires lecturers to shift from being sole providers of knowledge to becoming "Cultural Mentors" and "Tech-Facilitators". Educators must scaffold critical thinking, prompting students to evaluate if their chosen visual rhetoric reinforces or challenges national stereotypes. Furthermore, as detailed in the Composite Assessment Model (Rubric) in the Methodology (Section 3.3), Cultural Impact and Digital Diplomacy carry weight equal to Linguistic Accuracy to measure digital diplomacy effectively.

While lecturers may fear that reduced focus on grammar lowers standards, observations suggest that the "audience effect" drives students to self-correct more rigorously than in traditional tasks [24]. In summary, the findings suggest that validating the learners' cultural background as a primary asset resolves the tension between learning a global language and maintaining a local identity.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The integration of Vietnamese cultural values into English Language Teaching (ELT) through digital multimodal platforms represents a necessary pedagogical response to the dual demands of global integration and national soft power development. This study has illustrated that when learners are equipped with the strategic tools to narrate their own heritage in a global lingua franca, the

traditional hierarchy of native-speakerism can be challenged. The empirical data suggests that providing students with epistemic authority over their cultural content is strongly associated with a measurable reduction in foreign language anxiety and fosters a robust Glocal Identity. By evolving from passive consumers of Western-centric materials into active agents of cultural representation, participants demonstrated that linguistic proficiency is most effectively consolidated when tied to authentic self-expression and national belonging.

As an exploratory pilot study, the proposed framework offers preliminary insights into how higher education institutions in Vietnam might navigate the transition of the lecturer's role, particularly in navigating the transition of the lecturer's role from a primary source of linguistic knowledge to a strategic mentor and facilitator. The successful application of digital storytelling via platforms such as TikTok and Canva, supported by targeted AI scaffolding, indicates that modern technology can be harnessed to preserve local identity rather than accelerate its erosion. This research concludes that the effectiveness of ELT in the contemporary era should be evaluated not merely by grammatical precision, but by the learner's capacity to navigate intercultural spaces with confidence and cultural integrity.

Based on the findings, several recommendations for future practice are proposed. First, to support the transition toward digital diplomacy in ELT, institutional initiatives should prioritize equipping educators with specific training on multimodal assessment and source-culture integration pedagogy. Second, while the current data shows a significant correlation between cultural ownership and reduced anxiety, future longitudinal studies involving larger and more diverse cohorts across various regions of Vietnam would provide deeper insights into the permanence of these identity shifts. Finally, the curriculum should continue to integrate diverse aspects of intangible heritage, ensuring that the narratives produced by Vietnamese youth remain dynamic and representative of the nation's contemporary transformation. By aligning ELT objectives with broader strategic interests, Vietnamese higher education can cultivate a generation of bilingual professionals who are globally competent yet deeply rooted in their cultural foundations.

Given the exploratory nature of this pilot study and the relatively small sample size ($N=50$), the findings regarding identity shifts and micro-diplomacy should be interpreted with caution. The data heavily relies on self-reported surveys and short-term artifact analysis. While the study suggests potential alignments between classroom multimodal practices and broader goals like soft power, these macro-level impacts require further validation through longitudinal studies with larger, more diverse cohorts. Furthermore, the absence of a control group limits the ability to establish strict causal relationships between the intervention and the reduced anxiety. Future research should employ quasi-experimental designs with control groups and larger, more diverse cohorts to better validate the intervention's effectiveness and generalizability.

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